#4

An

Inaugural Dissertation

on

Lunar Influence

Submitted to the examination of the

the

Trustees and Medical Professors,

of the

University of Pennsylvania,

on the day of April, 1808.

for

The Degree of Doctor of Medicine.

By John W. Davis

of Chester County Pennsylvania

Honorary Member of the Philadelphia Medical Society.

In all
however
and in
against
vages a
possible
and
gaters
handful
(a) Divine
improv
ancius
which
more of
trained
new du
it of th
e.g.
a new
Direct

An Inaugural Dissertation on &c.&c.

In all scientific pursuits we should be extremely cautious how we admit those things which partake of the Marvellous; and in no subject whatever should we be more guarded against this than on Medicine. "The science of Medicine says an excellent writer ought to be kept as free of Miracles as possible." No superstitious theories as regards the cause and nature of diseases – no preposterous remedies suggested by the whimsical old woman, or, perhaps, still more fanciful physician, should ever gain admittance into this "Divine Art." Indeed, when I reflect on the subject, the new and improved aspect, which Medicine has assumed within a century past, seems to be more owing to a spirit of skepticism which has arisen and an order for canvassing the theoretical opinions of preceding writers, unfettered by the bramels of groundless prejudices, than to the many new discoveries which have been made. By ridding it of the immense mass of rubbish by which it was unfortunately surrounded for so many ages, it appears in quite a new form, and shines with its proper lustre.

That veil of obscurity which so long shrouded this

Blessed science from the eyes of the common people and confined its important truths to the temples and the priests, is at length happily removed. Yes, I repeat it, this Magnum Dei Donum, as formerly considered by the vulgar, those enclosistered arcana, which were so long locked up in the hallowed fane, have slipped from their sacred cells and readily unfolded their mysteries at the first demand of the most moderate capacity. The abolition of that monstrous practice of publishing medical works in a language unintelligable and obsolete contributes not a little also, to our facility of acquiring a knowledge of this useful art: when the excellent principles which have lately been established and proven to be correct by experience precludes the possibility of its enemies ever in future stigmatizing it with the unmerited epithets of uncertain and fallacious and as in a game of hazard every thing doubtful. That it may still be said to be in a measure uncertain and fallacious this we would by no means pretend to deny: in fact unfortunately for the human race it is too true not to be admitted: but may not the same thing be said

of every thing else. Who would renounce the science of navigation and abandon all the advantages resulting from a commercial intercourse with the different nations of the earth, because navigators have sometimes been deceived by irregular variation of the needle? why, then, renounce the science of Medicine or accuse it of uncertainty in an unlimited sense because we are not always able to determine the event of a disease or invariably foretell the effects which will result from the remedies we employ. But while I am thus enlarging on the entire utility of Medical knowledge the following question seems whispered in my ear: How physicians then completely freed themselves from every thing like prepossession in favor of every opinion and are such things alone admitted as truths as are proven to be so from correct observation and experience? happy would I be were I able to answer this question in the affirmative: but truth forbids it. Although we live in the 18th century prejudices superstitious prejudices I fear still prevail among us. I shall not in this improper place take upon me the task of pointing them out wherever I suspect them to exist

this at any time would be laborious and unpleasant
I shall however mention a few which ought to be
admitted by all who seriously reflect on the sub
ject. The first I shall take notice of is the belief
in the contagious nature of bilious epidemics
and the efficacy of Quarantine establishments
in preventing their propagation from country
to country. As the ingenious and justly admired
professor Rush very aptly observes in his Lectures
The practice of nailing horse-shoes over a the
door of a dwelling house in order to avert the pow
er of witches is not more truely ridiculous than
those expensive monuments of human folly
erected in our ports. The very name indicates
from what source this beneficial practice originate
ted. To point out clearly that there is a practical
error in the very principle upon which they are
founded would be no Herculean undertaking.
but it has been already done, I should subjoin
to the satisfaction of every man of sense.
How strictly too do the physicians of the present
day adhere to the old Hippocratic doctrine of cri
tical days which has no better foundation are

[illegible] extreme notion of the power of mere [illegible] a fanciful fancies has further gained ac[illegible] transmitted to his distant and superstitious [illegible] influence of the ~~moon~~ mind on the foetus in utero:
"And Jacob took him rods of green poplar, and of the hazel and chestnut tree; and pilled white strakes in them, and made the white appear which was in the rods. And he set the rods which he had pilled before the flocks in the gutters, the watering-troughs, when the flocks came to drink; that they should conceive when they came to drink. And the flocks conceived before the rods, and brought forth cattle ring-streaked and speckled and spotted. And Jacob did separate the lambs, and set the faces of the ~~[illegible]~~ flocks toward the ring-streaked, and all the brown in the flock of Laban: and he put his own flocks by themselves, and put them not unto Laban's cattle." There probably is not the source of that mistaken belief which still within a few years so generally prevails among physicians as well as the vulgar.

Gen. c. XXX v. 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42.

[illegible] fools! [illegible] [illegible] with [illegible] and philosophy as with the [illegible] required. If the by thy God thou wouldst [illegible] gives an argument from Holy-Writ in support of so great an error: which imprints on the tender [illegible] dies of a beloved offspring the image of a rat or a toad or a turtle entwines them with hideous snakes clothes their little frames with a [illegible] of various hues or sometimes (O miracle!) [illegible] them into the world with unfeatured limbs frame[illegible] bones or destitute of a head. Many other opinions equally fabulous with those mentioned or equally resulting from prejudice and want of reflection might be pointed out but as I did not contemplate doing it from the beginning I shall confine myself with mentioning one other which I intend shall be the subject of my particular animadversion in the remaining sheets. I allude to the influence of the moon upon the human [illegible] and terrestrial bodies in general which opinion is so generally received among us that the moon does exert some and a powerful

[illegible] opinion [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]
[illegible] (and best probable) which she derives from
[illegible] and transmits from herself to us no one
ever pretended to deny and this would be a [illegible]
of skepticism which shall not originate with [illegible]
I only mean to contend that it exerts no ou[illegible]
no inexplicable influence exclusive of these.
I am well aware that in this opinion I shall b[illegible]
somewhat singular indeed much more so th[illegible]
I would wish to be on such an occasion as th[illegible]
present: but truth is my sole object and I fe[illegible]
nothing will ever be able to prevent me from p[illegible]
uting her. The doctrine I have ~~[illegible]~~ advanc[illegible]
I well know wants neither antiquity nor the
weight of modern authority for its support but
both are insufficient to create an entity out of
thing or change an error into a truth. As I sa[illegible]
before the doctrine of lunar influence wants not
antiquity for its support among the ~~Hebrews~~ Greeks
the moon was always considered as an object [illegible]
they of prime regard. By the Hebrews she seem[illegible]
to be much more an object of reverence than th[illegible]
sun and was much more generally worshipped

[illegible] the sound of trumpets, entertainments and [illegible] to which was given to the citizens of Athens [illegible] and they were usually spent in the greatest festivity and mirth. The feasts of new moon were a ministure representation of the feast trumpets, which now held on the first of the month Tisri (corresponding to our Sept.r) which was the commencement of the civil year.

The Greeks seem to have considered the [illegible] as particularly favorable to marriages; and [illegible] full moons or the times of conjunction of the [illegible] and moon, were held the most lucky seasons for celebrating them, because they imagined the moon to have great influence over generation.

The Spartans always looked upon the full moon as particularly favorable for any undertakings more especially for those which related to war and no motives could induce them to enter upon an expedition, march an army or attack an enemy till the full of the Moon.

The moon was especially by the Greeks and Romans

to preside over child birth were she was so fre-
-quently invoked during times of labor under the name
of Lucina. For all ages too the power of the
moon over the weather been believed to be considerable
But the writers who treat of the signs of the wea-
-ther as taken from the moon, derive their proof
this from circumstances which neither prove
any real influence of the moon over weather, nor
affords any foundation for such a belief: but are
merely indications of the state of the air at the
time of observation; such are the shape of the ho-
-rns degree and color of the light, and the circumstan-
-tial quality of the luminous halos which some
times surrounds her. Perhaps I should confine my-
-self more particularly to its effects, or, more prop-
-erly speaking, supposed effects on the human body
but the tides of the ocean have been so frequently
pointed as a manifest proof of the moon's in-
-fluence on terrestrial things that I trust I shall be allo-
-wed tho' it may be in some measure irrelative to
my theme to bring forwards a few arguments
calculated to show that even this theory
is merely unfounded in reason and fact. It is
much to be regretted that men are so apt to assume

Experts do some concomitant circumstances which for a day may be only accidental or have nothing to do in the duration of them. Thus the heat has been supposed to be the cause of what have been termed Bilious Epidemics because it is accidentally so, dried up from the stomach, and the esculent and wholesome root the potatoe so accused of producing the sickness shortly following its introduction into Europe nor is there any fact that the moon produces the tides save that high water appears in some places about the time the moon is in the meridian of that place I say only in some places for it is by no means uniformly the case.

If the Newtonian theory* respecting the tides of the ocean were well founded I should be glad to know why the tides under the equator are not higher than at the poles which are so much further removed from the pretended influence of that nocturnal luminary again why the current of the tides is diurnal. Tides under instead of from the equator as they should be were the opinion of Sir Isaac well grounded..

That this is not the case is proven from the observations of Ellis Lemprotten, Barrents, Cook, Marden, Byron, Carteret and others. Again if they be owing to the power of the moon why are the tides during

* We commonly use Newtonian theory but it was advanced long before the time of Sir Isaac celebrated philosopher.

summer as much higher than the ice in the lake
when the moon passes thro' over into the northern
point which is also proven by the accounts given
by many navigators.* Why too are there no tides in
lakes the circumference of lake superior is upwards
sixteen hundred miles and yet there is no perceptible
rising or falling of its waters Why too none in the
Mediterranean, Caspian and Baltic seas the first
of which is of three thousand miles in length and nine
two thousand five hundred in breadth yet the moon
even when in the zenith of this vast body of water
produces no appearance of a tide. Moreover why is
not the barometer affected equal to a column of wa-
ter of 18. 20. 30. 50 or an hundred feet in height.
the barometer if any is at any time very little
influenced. Tho I might offer many other obje-
tions to the commonly received opinion respecting
the cause of tides I shall omit doing it in this
and refer the reader to the excellent and ingenious
work of De Saint Pierre which should be in every
gentleman's library and perused at least once a year a-
mitier. Cook dl.

[illegible] for our mere improvements in scientific subjects to teach us our humble and dependant condition [illegible] upon the mercy of God.

If then this strong hold be wrested from the [illegible] of the upholders of this erroneous doctrine what a mass of proof can they have of its influence on human body either in health or disease. Mead [illegible] Cullen and others have written particularly on this subject and we are assured by facts to be [illegible] in Darwin Moseley Carlisle &c. As to Dr Mead [illegible] there is the frequent spoken of as contributing most positive it is in our humble opinion [illegible] with reading and rather has a tendency to prove the contrary of which he intended by showing [illegible] have been the attempts of so ingenious and learned a man. As to Epilepsy hemicrania hemorrhagia of blood, manias relapses of fever menstruation [illegible] they are occurring every day and at all the [illegible] of the moon. No one has not known if he have ever been an attentive practitioner. Epilepsy occurs every day [illegible] without regard to the moon.

[illegible] a person [illegible] may [illegible]
times in the day and as equally independent of [illegible]
even the women themselves who are so fond of ascribing effects to this body never attribute their periodical flux to this cause.

At what numerous and different periods patients relapse into a state of derangement [illegible] of them must unavoidably happen on human principles otherwise I should at once renounce my opinion and adopt the doctrine of lunar influence. The ancients believe the moon possessed of the power of exciting or preventing their attacks at certain periods.

But when we consider the subject how much our opponents take but how little chance do they give us of disproving their theory. They contend the moon exerts her influence at the syzygies and quadratures, and for three days before and three days after each of these periods. There are twenty four days therefore in each synodic month over which at most one only is supposed to preside; and as the whole [illegible]

but of twenty nine days twelve hours and three fourths, only five and a half days are excepted from her pretended dominion. Hence though disease should have no connection with the different positions of the moon and tho' they be distributed in an equal proportion through the whole synodic month yet any one who shall predict that an attack or relapse or any change will happen on any one of the twenty four days assigned, rather than in any of the remaining five and a half will always have the chances twenty four to five and a half in his favor.

But I perceive the narrow limits which I have assigned to my dissertation will not allow me to dwell longer on the subject of it I shall therefore put a conclusion to my imperfect essay as to its imperfections no person can be more conscious of them than myself In the eyes of no one will these sheets appear contemptible than my own Perhaps had not bodily indisposition prevented I might

have
of con
mun
ouep
growing
from
Not
of the
Barb
friend
rodem
Cert
mon
birthe
by co
elf
ubl

have rendered it more worthy the medical school of which it is a production. Before concluding I must beg the several professors of the university to accept (tis all I have to offer) my sincerest my most grateful thanks for the instruction I have received from them in their professional labourities.
Not being personally acquainted ~~with~~ to any one of them (save the benevolent social and hospitable Barton) I am indebted but for few acts of private friendship conferred. O kind and beneficent providence what a misfortune can befal us in our lot passes through life from which we do not reap more or less advantage. Had this not been the case perhaps I should at present have labored under many obligations which I never could have freed myself from... Adieu! Prosperity attend all your laudable efforts.. — — — — — — — —

Finis.

the
tion
F
o
F
m
of